



Issue 10, September 2008
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Welcome to the September 2008 edition of the Ofcom Consumer Panel e-newsletter.

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Position statement on NGA

Next generation access (NGA) systems will soon routinely provide speeds of 100 Mbit/s and more. That needs to be compared with basic broadband with an 'always-on' connection which could be thought of as 512 Kbit/s. BT's ADSL2+ service is already providing up to 24 Mbit/s and Virgin Media's cable network will be able to offer 50 Mbit/s. But BT's recent announcement of a £1.5 billion investment to bring next generation access to up to 10 million households by 2012 should kick-start the NGA roll-out in the UK.

The Panel recognises that the extent and speed of the roll-out must depend on sound and sensible business cases and that, in the main, the market will deliver what is demanded, when it makes economic sense to do so. It is not our wish – and indeed it would not be in consumers' interests – for the private or public sector to make investments that involve excessive risk.

We believe, however, that the issue of value cannot be confined simply to a narrow accounting measure of value to the private company building the new network. Value needs to embrace a wider economic and social value that captures the full range of benefit to consumers and citizens and to government, competitiveness and the wider economy.

The Panel has just published a position statement on NGA. You can read the full text of our statement at:

<http://www.ofcomconsumerpanel.org.uk/advice/documents/K5.pdf>

Current Ofcom consultations

On the Panel, we recognise that it is difficult for consumer organisations to keep track of all Ofcom's consultation documents and to identify those with a specific consumer interest that merit special attention.

We suggest that there are three current consultations that have a particular consumer dimension and that you might like to check out:

- The review of quality of service information – consultation closes on 8 October 2008.
Further information is available at:
<http://ofcom.org.uk/consult/condocs/gos08/>
- Citizens, Communications and Convergence – consultation closes on 8 October 2008
Further information is available at:
<http://ofcom.org.uk/consult/condocs/citizens/>
- Mobile citizens, mobile consumers – consultation closes on 6 November 2008
Further information is available at:
<http://www.ofcom.org.uk/consult/condocs/msa08/>

Note: the Mobile citizens, mobile consumers consultation has a blog on which you are invited to comment. This is quite an innovation for Ofcom so please do participate at <http://comment.ofcom.org.uk/mobileblog/> .

Goodbye from the Panel

A number of Panel members have now reached the end of their terms and stepped down. So we say many thanks and farewell to Graham Mather, Jeremy Mitchell, Kate O'Rourke, Bob Twitchin and Allan Williams.

A reorganisation of Panel staffing has led to the departure of the Panel Manager Georgia Klein. We thank her for all her hard work and wish her well for the future.

Coming to the Panel

Most interviews have been conducted for new Panel members. Once they are complete and we have final clearance from Ministers we expect to announce the names of new appointees in the next few weeks.

We have just appointed a new Policy Executive and we are recruiting for a new Panel Manager with a closing date for applications of 12 September 2008. See the advertisement at: <http://www.ofcom.org.uk/about/jobs/jobs/principal>

Panel meetings

The Consumer Panel normally meets monthly (we have just had our 50th meeting), except in the month of August. The agendas and minutes of Panel meetings are published on our website, and you can see what is coming up on the next Panel meeting agenda in the Looking Ahead section of the Panel website. Because of the transition between Panels, we are not meeting in September 2008.

Welcome to Consumer Focus

An important change in the consumer work is the creation of Consumer Focus (previously known as the New National Consumer Council) where Ed Mayo is the Chief Executive. This is a merger of Energywatch, Postwatch and the current National Consumer Council and will come into full effect on 1 October 2008.

The Ofcom Consumer Panel will be working very closely with Consumer Focus. Our relationship will be guided by a Memorandum of Understanding which we are currently discussing.

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